A Little Book of Saint Francis and His Brethren

by Ethel Mary Wilmot-Buxton

A Little Book of Saint Francis and His Brethren

by Ethel Mary Wilmot-Buxton

The Story of Saint Francis Himself

This is the Story of Saint Francis, the Little Poor Man of Assisi, the son of Peter Bernadone, the cloth merchant.

A merry lad was Francis, with pockets full of money which he loved to scatter far and wide among his friends and neighbours. "One would think he was a prince instead of a merchant's son," they said of him; and they spoke more truly than they knew. For Francis was to become one of the princes of God.

Yet in those days he was but a careless youth, caring rather to lead the revels than to go to Vespers, and loving the song book of the troubadour rather than the breviary of the priest, and his wish was to wear a gay coat and go forth to win glory in the wars as a knight-errant. But when the neighbours talked of his worldliness and love of song and finery, his mother, the Lady Pica, said of him:

"I will tell you how this son of mine will turn out. He will become a son of God."

Now it came to pass that during the first battle in which Francis took part, against the men of the neighbour city of Perugia, he was taken prisoner among many others and lodged in prison. And whilst in prison, seeing that all around him were very sad and heavy, he began to be merry and to laugh and sing for joy. Then they said to him: "Surely you are mad that you can be merry in prison?" And Francis answered and said: "Would you know why I am merry? It is because I know the day will come when all men will bow down to me." But they did not understand his words, neither did he at that time realise how they should one day be fulfilled.

After a time it came to pass that the prisoners of war were set free, and Francis returned to Assisi. But soon after he was struck with a sore sickness and went down to the gates of death. And it was during the slow weeks of his recovery that there first came to him the call of God. He understood it not at all - then - but wondered at the strange thoughts that troubled him, and longed for his old free life among the hills and gardens of Assisi. But when he first went forth, walking feebly and resting upon a staff, to gaze upon the beauty of the fair earth, he found that for the time it had passed away: the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards and all that is fair to the eye no longer gladdened him. Wherefore he was amazed at the change that had so suddenly come upon him, and thought them most foolish who could love these things.

Now in those days there was bitter war over the isle of Sicily between the Germans and the Pope; and the brave Count Walter of Brienne was leading his army forth upon the side of the Holy Father of Christendom. So Francis, restless and eager for adventure, equipped himself in fine raiment, as became a rich merchant's son, and went forth to join the battle against the Germans. But as he rode forth in splendid array, he fell in with a knight who had fought for many years in the wars, and whose dress was worn and very shabby. Then Francis, moved by sudden impulse, leaped from his horse and gave his fine mantle and tunic and all his array to the poor knight, taking his shabby outfit in exchange.

That evening, as he rested in an inn upon the road, he slept and dreamed a sweet dream. He heard his name called: "Francis, son of Peter Bernadone, come with me whither I shall lead you."

So he followed an unknown guide till he came to a fair palace, set about with knightly arms, and in the midst sat a

beautiful lady, robed as a bride. And as he gazed, wondering to whom this palace belonged, his guide said: "This is for you and all your followers. And the lady shall be your bride."

Then Francis awoke and went out into the sunlight; and as he went he sang with joy because of that dream. And when his companions asked him why he was so merry, he made answer: "Now know I for a surety that I shall become a great prince."

Then he continued on his journey.

But that night, when he went to rest, the mysterious voice again addressed him; and now he was but half asleep. And the voice questioned him and said:

"Francis, whom is it better to serve, the Lord or the servants?"

To which, wondering, he replied: "Surely it is better to serve the Lord."

"Why, then," asked the Voice, "dost thou make a lord of the servants?"

Then Francis understood, and a great light shone within his soul, so that he said very humbly:

"Lord, what dost Thou wish me to do?"

And the voice said: "Return to the land of thy birth and there it will be told thee what thou shalt do. And, perchance, thou mayst find another meaning to thy dream."

So when the morrow came, very soberly and sadly did Francis return to Assisi, and there set himself to wait till the will of the Lord was made known to him. Only did he fully understand that henceforth he was enrolled under the banner of his Captain, Jesus Christ, and that he would never serve any other lord.

There, for a time, he lived his old life, helping in his father's business, ruling the revels of the youth of the city; but all the while he was silently watching the poor, the outcast, and the lepers who thronged the gates and by-ways, so that he seemed often deep in thought. And once they asked him scoffingly: "Art thou in love, Francis, thou little son of Peter?"

And Francis answered very gravely: "Aye, in truth, I am thinking of wedding a wife more beautiful and noble than any you have seen." Then they laughed at him, not knowing that he spoke of My Lady Poverty.

The Story of How Saint Francis Became Poor for the Love of Christ

As the days passed by, Francis, son of Peter Bernadone, became still more grave and thoughtful, and again he watched the poor of the city, at first from afar, then ever nearer and nearer. And one evening, when he came home and found the table richly spread for a banquet he was giving to his friends, he suddenly went in and took the dishes of food and the goblets of wine and carried them out to the poor who sat at the gates. Yet all the while he loved them not, and shrank from their look and touch and smell.

Now one day he bethought himself to go on pilgrimage to the city of Rome, where is the tomb of the Apostles Peter and Paul. He took with him rich offerings of silver and gold for the shrine, but when he had laid them there, he noticed how meagre were the gifts of the wealthy pilgrims, and, turning away, he poured out the contents of his wallet full of money into the outstretched hands of Christ's little ones, the poor who lay at the doors of the Church. Then a thought of fantasy struck him, and he borrowed from one of them his worn and ragged suit of clothes, and at the gate of Saint Peter's, Francis, son of the rich merchant of Assisi, became one of the brotherhood of beggars for the day.

But his friends only laughed, and said it was one of his madcap tricks.

It was but just after his return that as he was one day riding back to the city upon his fine horse, a leper stood in his way and asked an alms. And Francis, sickening at sight of him, was about to fling him an alms and ride quickly on his way. But he could not do so, and found himself constrained to

dismount, and as he put the money in the leper's hand, he bent his head and kissed it. Then, all in a moment, his heart melted within him for pity of all the poor hurt creatures in the world, and, taking the leper in his arms, he gave him the kiss of Peace.

And from that moment Francis entered within the palace that he had seen in his dream.

But he was yet to find My Lady Poverty, robed like a bride, within.

One day he was walking at eventide near the little ruined church of Saint Damian outside the city, and noting its crumbling walls and broken door. And, feeling strangely drawn to enter, he went and prayed before the altar; and it seemed to him that Christ bent down from the Cross saying:

"Francis, go and repair my house, which, as you see, is wholly a ruin."

And Francis, astonished but obedient, said: "Gladly, Lord, will I repair it" And as he spoke, his heart was filled to the brim with the Love of God, so that he felt he would gladly live and die in His service.

And so he became the squire of his Captain Christ.

Then, going home, he gathered a goodly store of cloth from his father's warehouse, and rode off to the Market Town and sold both cloth and horse, and, walking back to Assisi, gave the money to the priest of Saint Damian wherewith to rebuild his church. He begged him also to let him abide there with him, since he had no wish to return to his father's business. But, though the priest was willing that he should abide with him, he was afraid to take so much money from one whom he thought but a wild and careless youth; so he

refused what Francis had brought. Then Francis flung it through a window into the church and left it there; but he abode still with the priest.

Now when Peter Bernadone heard of what Francis had done, and how he had left the business and was living with the priest, he was very wroth indeed. And, though he had always allowed his son to take what goods he wished, or had given him their worth in money, now he chose to say that he had robbed him and was acting directly against his will. So when the mother of Francis sent word to him of his father's anger, the boy went and hid himself in a cave of the hillside, where his mother sent him food; and there he lay for a whole month.

At length, however, he was filled with shame for his cowardice, and coming forth with the daylight he appeared in the streets of Assisi with face pale and wan, and his once fine clothes stained with damp and soil. And those who met him began to jeer at him, calling him "mad man," and many ill names besides. And when they found that Francis, once so spirited, heard them in silence and with downcast eyes, they took up stones and mud and flung them at him.

But his father heard the noise and came running forth from his house, and when he saw in what sorry plight stood his son, he was angrier with him for his pride's sake than before. Rushing upon him, he seized him by the tunic, dragged the boy indoors, gave him a sound flogging, and shut him up in a dark room. And when he was obliged to leave the house on business, he put chains on his hands and his feet.

Then there came to him his sweet mother, the Lady Pica, and pleaded with him that he should obey his father and return to his old way of life. But when her son had told her what was in his heart, she ceased to plead with him, and

henceforth was on his side. And she freed him from his chains and sent him back to the priest of Saint Damian.

When Peter Bernadone returned, he was filled with fury and went forth from the city, thinking to drive his son back with blows and reproaches. But Francis bore both with quiet confidence; only he would not fail the call of his new Master nor return money that he had given to the Church. So Peter went first to the corporation and then to the Bishop's Court, in order that his son might be forced to return to him or to restore the money he had given to the Church.

Then was a Court held at Assisi, and the Bishop, looking not unkindly upon the boy he had known from childhood, bade Francis return to his father the money, saying: "Remember, my son, that God will Himself provide thee with what is necessary, and needs not to be succoured with goods that may not have been justly procured."

Whereupon Francis cried in his zeal: "My Lord, not only the money which belongs to him, but also the clothes that I wear, which are his, I will give back." And immediately, having handed over the money, he stripped himself of all his garments save only the hair shirt that he wore next his skin. And, turning to the people, he cried: "Hear ye all and understand. Until now I have called Peter Bernadone my father, but because I would now say 'Our Father Who art in Heaven' in place of 'our father, Peter,' I return him his money concerning which he was troubled, and all the clothes I had of him."

Then Peter was inflamed with fury and with an exceeding sorrow, and he gathered up clothes and money and left the court; but the Bishop, in compassion for the son, put his arms round him and a fold of his cloak about his bare limbs,

until a rough tunic could be found for him among the servants.

And from that day did Francis go forth, no longer a rich youth, but as the Little Poor Man of Assisi, who had found the Lady Poverty and chosen her for his bride.

The Story of How Saint Francis Began His Building

Now when Francis first became poor for the love of Christ, he walked upon the hillside above Saint Damian, and his heart was so full of joy that he sang aloud as the Troubadour of God. And coming presently to a lonely place infested by robbers, he was stopped by a band of these wicked ones who demanded who he might be.

"What is that to you?" asked Francis. "Know, however, that I am a herald of the Great King."

Then the robbers stripped him of his rough tunic and flung him into a ditch full of snow.

"Lie there, thou fool herald!" said they, and left him alone.

He was soon on his feet again, and laughing at his sorry plight; and after he had asked and obtained a pilgrim's dress from a friend who lived near by, he returned to Assisi.

The priest of Saint Damian was glad to offer him food and shelter, and at once Francis set to work to find materials wherewith to build up the church anew. For in those days he thought the call had come only to build the walls and tower of stone; whereas in later days he understood that he had been bidden to build up The Church which is made up of the souls of men.

So day by day he walked gaily through the streets of the city, chanting a song after the fashion of a troubadour:

"Who will give stones for the building of Saint Damian?
Who so gives one stone shall have one reward;

Who so gives two stones shall have two rewards;
Who so gives three stones shall have three rewards."

And they all ran together to hear him, and some jeered, but others gave what he wanted, so that he returned heavy laden to the church of Saint Damian.

Then, with the aid of friendly peasants he began to build, and when those who passed by stopped to watch his building, he would call out to them and say: "Come and help us in our work, good people. For this church of Saint Damian will one day be a convent for holy ladies whose life and fame will be for the Glory of God."

And so it came to pass. For that place became the site of the convent of Saint Clare and her sisters, who, with their prayers and good works, glorified God and the Order of the Friars Minor.

Now sometimes it happened that when Francis was very weary with his hard day's work, the priest of Saint Damian would tempt him with food, delicate and fine, such as he had been accustomed to all his life. But soon he became affrighted of this liking for delicate food, seeing that he had embraced the Lady Poverty; so he said to himself:

"Not everywhere, O greedy one, will you find men to minister to your wants as does this good priest. This is not the life of one who has chosen Poverty for his bride. Rise up, thou lazy one, and go begging from door to door the leavings of the table."

So next day he rose up and went, carrying a dish into the city; and the citizens, laughing, filled it with their scraps. And this became the custom of the Friars Minor, so that they never forgot the poverty of Christ and the hardships of the poor.

Now when Francis had rebuilt Saint Damian he turned him to another ruined chapel by the wayside, Saint Mary of the Little Portion, which the natives call the "Porziuncula," and that chapel in the wood became his beloved home. He loved the music in the tree tops when the wind blew down the hillside, and the piping of the birds, and the soft pad of lithe beasts among the bushes; and all these things became his brothers and his sisters. And in those days he made for himself a habit of rough brown stuff shaped like a cross and girded himself with a rope; and this is the dress worn by his followers to this very day.

The Story of Brother Bernard and His Sack of Money

The first companion of Francis was Brother Bernard of Assisi. This Bernard was one of the most rich. most noble, and most learned young men of the town. And it came to pass in the days that Francis walked the streets and by-ways as an outcast, that he watched him.

Now it was some two years since Francis, having left his home, had shown his change of heart by his quiet, yet joyful manner, his shabby threadbare clothes, and his love for the poor and the lepers. But the men of Assisi did not yet understand that he had heard the call of God, and they still mocked at him at times and stoned him as he passed by, and jeered at him as though he had lost his wits.

When Bernard saw all this, and marked how patiently Francis bore their ill-usage, he began to think and to say within himself:

"This young man must have great grace from God. And I, too, would gladly follow his example and give up all for the sake of the Lord Jesus if I were truly sure that he is a saint"

So one evening he bade Francis come to sup with him and stay the night; and as they sat at meat he watched him. But Francis would make no outward show of his saintliness, and laughed and talked with him all the while in sheer gladness of heart.

When it was time to go to rest, Bernard had a bed prepared for him in his own bed-chamber, where there was always a light burning, and there again he watched him to see if he would spend the night in prayer. But Francis, in his humility,

would not let him know what he meant to do, but at once threw himself upon the bed and pretended to sleep soundly.

Then Bernard also lay down and snored loudly, as though he, too, were fast asleep.

And when Francis thought he slept, he rose immediately from the bed, and, kneeling before the figure of Christ Crucified, he began to pray aloud, saying over and over again:

"My God! My God!"

And so he prayed all night, being lost to all but the thought of Him who had stooped down from Heaven to rescue the soul of His little son Francis, and being filled with love of Him so that he thought not of rest or sleep, but only how he might in return help to save the souls of others.

And Bernard watched and wondered till the daylight dawned. When morning was fully come he went straightway to Francis, saying: "Brother, I have determined to give up the world and to follow you in all that you command me."

Then was Francis very glad, but with that wisdom and prudence which is the mark of a true saint, he bade him consider the matter well, seeing that he was a man of great worldly wealth. So they decided to hear Mass together at the Bishop's house, and afterwards, by thrice opening the Missal, to learn thereby what might be the will of God in this matter.

Now when they had heard Mass, they begged the good priest to open the Missal at hap-hazard, and these were the words they read:

"If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and follow Me."

Then he opened it a second time, and these were the words they read:

"Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor scrip, nor bread, nor money."

Then he opened it a third time, and these were the words they read:

"If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross and follow Me."

So they departed in great joy to carry out these commands. And Bernard hastened to sell all his goods, and he put the money in a sack, and, with the help of Francis, he distributed it to the sick, to widows and orphans, to prisoners, to monasteries, and to pilgrims, whenever he found them in need.

Now there was in Assisi a certain man named Silvester, from whom Francis had once bought a load of stones wherewith to build up the ruined church of which you have read and heard.

When this man saw that Francis was giving money so freely to the poor, and helping Bernard to do likewise by finding out those who were in distress, he was moved with avarice.

So he sought out Francis in the by-ways where he was distributing money to the starving lepers, and said to him:

"You did not pay me enough for those stones which you bought of me for the repair of yonder church. And now, since you have so much money, you shall pay me a fitting price."

When Francis saw his avarice, he was amazed, but without a word of dispute, he put both hands into Bernard's sack, and, filling them with coins, placed the money in the bag which Silvester held out, saying that if he wished more he could have it.

Now it came to pass, as Silvester sat at home that night and thought of the gentleness with which Francis had made answer to him, that he was filled with shame and began to blame himself bitterly for what he had done. And as he sat and mused, there came to him thrice over, on three successive nights, a vision from God. He saw Francis stand upon a hillside, and from his lips there stretched a golden cross, the top whereof touched Heaven and the arms whereof reached from East to West.

So Silvester, too, was touched by the Grace of God, and, following the example of Brother Bernard, sold all his goods and became a Friar Minor. And so holy was his life within the Order of Saint Francis, that it was seen that he spoke with God as one friend speaks with another.

Yet might this never have happened had it not been for Brother Bernard of Assisi and his sack of gold.

The Story of the Pride of Brother Elias

It happened one day, when Francis was praying in the thick green wood at Saint Mary Porziuncula, that a fair youth dressed as a traveller came to the door of the Convent of the Friars Minor hard by, and he knocked with such haste and noise, and for so long a time, that the Brothers within were greatly astonished.

It was good Brother Masseo who went to the door, and when he saw the youth he said very gently:

"Whence do you come, my little son? For never before have you visited us, I think, since you have not knocked according to our use."

"How then must I knock, good brother?" asked the youth.

And Brother Masseo replied: "You should give three knocks, one after the other, with a pause between each. Then you should wait till the Brother Porter has said Our Father, and if by that time he does not come, then knock again."

Then said the youth: "I am hastening upon a journey and on my way I wish to speak to Brother Francis, and, therefore, I knocked so loud. But he is now wrapt in prayer in yonder wood, and I do not wish to disturb him. Go, therefore, and tell Brother Elias that I wish to put a question to him, for I hear he is a very learned man."

So Brother Masseo went and told Brother Elias what the fair boy had said; but Elias was annoyed at such a summons and would not go to the door.

Then was Brother Masseo much perturbed, for if he had said that Brother Elias could not come it would have been a lie; and if he had said he would not come because of his pride, he feared to give a bad example to the boy visitor.

Meantime the boy was knocking again, and louder still, so that Brother Masseo, going to the door, said unto him:

"You have not yet profited by my lesson in knocking."

To which the youth replied:

"Brother Elias will not come to me because of pride, but go, tell Brother Francis that I came to speak with him, and that as I do not wish to hinder him from prayer, I bid him send Brother Elias to me."

So Masseo went and found Brother Francis praying in the wood with his face turned towards Heaven. And he told him all. Then Francis perceived that the youth was an angel of God in the form of a man, and, without turning his face from Heaven, he said:

"Bid Brother Elias go immediately, under obedience, to this young man."

So Elias went to the door and banged it open with great noise and discourtesy, saying: "What in the world do you want?" To which the youth replied: "Have a care, Brother, for anger troubles the soul and blinds the eyes."

"Tell me what you want, I say," cried Brother Elias, getting still more angry. So the youth put these two questions to him:

"Is it lawful for a follower of the Gospel of Christ to eat that which is set before him? Is it lawful for any man to destroy

the liberty that the Gospel teaches?"

Then was Brother Elias very wroth, for he knew what he meant, and he answered very haughtily: "I know well, but I will not answer you; go about your business."

"Perhaps I could answer those questions better than you can," said the youth, but Brother Elias shut the door in his face, and in great anger went away.

But when he began to think he realised that he could not answer those questions at all, seeing that he, being in authority in the Order, had made a rule that was not in the Gospel, to the effect that no brother should eat meat at any time. And being very uneasy, he remembered that the youth had said, albeit very modestly, that he could best answer those questions; so he returned to the door and opened it again, meaning to have further speech about the matter.

But the fair youth had disappeared; for the pride of Brother Elias made him unworthy to speak with an angel.

Now after this, when Brother Elias was walking in the Wood, came Francis to him and rebuked him, saying:

"How ill done to drive away the angel who came hither to teach us! See what cometh of wicked pride of heart! I fear me greatly that thy pride will make thee end thy days outside this Order."

(And so in after days it surely came to pass, for Brother Elias died outside the Order of the Friars Minor.)

At that same hour when the Angel departed from the house, came Brother Bernard from a long pilgrimage to the bank of a deep river which he knew not how to cross.

And there came to his side one like unto a comely youth, who saluted him saying:

"God give thee peace, good Brother!"

And the holy Brother Bernard, seeing his fair and joyful countenance, asked him whence he came. And the youth replied:

"I come from the place where abides the good Francis, and would have spoken with him but could not, for he was wrapt in prayer. In that place abide also Brother Masseo and Brother Elias. Brother Masseo taught me how to knock at the door like a Friar Minor, but Brother Elias was too proud to come to me, and when he was obliged to come, he would not answer my questions, and therefore were his eyes blinded so that he could not see me when he would."

Then looking kindly upon Brother Bernard, he said:

"Why do you not cross over?"

"Because," said Bernard, "I am greatly in fear of being drowned."

"Fear not. Let us cross together," said the youth. Forthwith he took the hand of the brother and in a moment, without appearing to move, they stood upon the further bank.

Then Brother Bernard knew that he was in the presence of an angel and cried in a loud voice:

"O thou blessed one of God. Tell me, what is thy name?"

And the Angel replied:

"My name is Wonderful."

And having said this, he vanished from his sight.

The Story of How Saint Francis Converted the Wolf of Gubbio

At one time Francis was living in the city of Gubbio, which is surrounded by thick forests and beset by lonely paths.

And about that period there lived in the forest a very ferocious Grey Wolf, who came out of the Woods from time to time and devoured all the cattle in the district. And if any man met him in the way, the Grey Wolf sprang upon him and devoured him also.

Then the citizens of Gubbio became very much alarmed, and they all carried arms whenever they went outside the walls as though they were going to battle. But in spite of their arms, they always got the worst of it if they met the wolf alone, so that for fear of him no one dared go out of the gates of the city.

Then Francis felt great compassion for the men of Gubbio, seeing that they were cut off from intercourse with their neighbours in the other cities of the plain. So he said: "I will go forth and convert this wicked wolf who makes men to fear."

But they implored him not to go, saying: "He will certainly kill you, seeing that you carry no arms."

Notwithstanding their entreaties, Francis determined to go forth, and having made the Sign of the Cross, he went out into the fields that surrounded the city. And at first his companions followed him, but when he took the path that led to the forest, they held back and hesitated to go further. But Francis went boldly forward, and they all stood afar off and watched him.

And behold, when the Saint drew nigh to the forest, the monstrous Grey Wolf rushed out upon him with open mouth and long red tongue. And when he had come nigh, Francis made over him the Sign of the most Holy Cross, and called out to him:

"Come along, Brother Wolf. I command you in the name of Christ that you do no harm to me or to any one."

And then a wondrous thing happened. For as soon as Francis had made the Sign of the Cross, the great Grey Wolf shut his mouth and ceased to leap, but came running gently like a lamb, and lay down to rest at the feet of the Saint.

Then did Francis make treaty with the Wolf of Gubbio, and said to him:

"Brother Wolf, you have done much evil in these parts, killing and ravaging the creatures of God without His permission. You have killed not only cattle, but also men, which is the sin of murder; and for this you deserve to be hung upon the gallows as a thief and a murderer. For this, indeed, all the people in this district cry out against you, and every man is your enemy.

"But now. Brother Wolf, I am come to make peace between them and you. And if you promise never again to offend, they shall forgive you and neither men nor dogs shall persecute you any more."

Then the great Grey Wolf bowed his head and wagged his tail and gazed up at Francis, crouching meantime at his feet, in order to show that he agreed to all he said.

And Francis said again:

"Brother Wolf, since you promise to keep this peace, I promise on my side that your food shall be given to you day by day by the men of this place, since I know well that it is hunger that has driven you to all this evil. But since I have given you this pledge, you must promise me never again to harm man or beast. Do you promise me this?"

Then the Grey Wolf bent his head and licked the hand of the Saint. But Francis said:

"Brother Wolf, I would have you pledge your faith that you will keep your promise, for without this I cannot trust you very well."

So saying, he held out his hand, and lo, the great Grey Wolf of Gubbio lifted up his right paw and gently placed it in the hand of Francis as a pledge of faith.

Then Francis said:

"Brother Wolf, I command you in the Name of Jesus Christ that you come now with me and we will confirm this peace in the name of God."

And the wolf followed him like a gentle dog towards the city; and his companions when they saw this marvelled greatly.

Now when they entered the city, all the citizens, great and small, young and old, rich and poor, thronged together in the market-place to see that strange sight. For Francis came

in alone through the gates of the city and his hand rested upon the head of the great Grey Wolf, his sole companion; and the wolf was walking gently by his side like an affectionate dog.

Then, seeing so many people gathered together, Francis began to preach to them, telling them how far worse were the jaws of hell than the fangs of a wolf, and bidding them repent of their sins. And when he had finished preaching, he said:

"See, my brethren, Brother Wolf, who is here before you, has promised and pledged me his troth to make peace with you and never to offend you again; and you, on your part, must promise to give him every day his necessary food. And I myself am his surety that he will keep the peace."

Then, when the people with one accord had promised to give him food, Francis called again on the Grey Wolf to pledge his troth. And once again the wolf, lifting up his right paw, placed it in the hand of the Saint.

And from this time the Grey Wolf lived for the space of two years in Gubbio, visiting the houses and going from door to door, without doing injury to anyone or anyone doing injury to him. And all the people welcomed him within their dwellings; nor, as he went about the fields and lanes, did any dog bark at him.

At the end of two years Brother Wolf died of old age, and all the citizens of Gubbio grieved at his loss; for while he went about the city so gently and kindly, they were reminded every time they saw him of the sweet and holy Francis.

The Story of the Wild Turtle-Doves

Now it happened one day that as Francis was walking along the high road, he met a certain boy who had been in the woods since a very early hour. And this boy was carrying a wicker basket full of md turtle-doves which he had caught in the woods; and these he had tied together and was now carrying to the market where he hoped to sell them.

But when Francis saw him, he stopped and gazed at the gentle birds, for whom he had always a very special love and compassion; and he said to the boy:

"O, my little son, I pray you give me these poor birds, and do not let them fall into the hands of cruel men who would wring their sweet necks."

And at first the boy would not, but, looking into the loving eyes of the Saint, he immediately took them from the basket and gave them all to Francis, and he, receiving them into his arms, said to them tenderly:

"O, my dear little sisters, so simple, innocent, and pure, why did you let yourselves be snared and carried so far from your home? But now will I save you from death and make nests for you, where you may increase and multiply."

So Francis went and made nests for them all in the trees that stood about his dwelling; and the doves took to the nests, and laid their eggs, and hatched their young without fear under the eyes of the Brothers; and they were as tame with Francis and with all the Brothers as though they had been always fed from their hands. Nor would they depart from that place until Francis had given them his blessing and leave to go away.

And when next Francis walked upon that high road, he met the boy who had given him the birds; and the boy saluted him with reverence. Then Francis smiled on him and said:

"Little son, you will one day be a Brother in this Order of Friars Minor, and will become a noble servant of Jesus Christ."

And this came to pass; for the boy became a Brother of the Order of Saint Francis, and a very great saint.

How Saint Francis Taught Brother Leo the Secret of Perfect Joy

Now once on a time it happened that Francis set out to walk with Brother Leo from the hill city of Perugia to the convent of Saint Mary of the Angels. And as they went along the high hill road, there came upon them a bitter wind and a very heavy fall of snow; and Brother Leo, as he walked in front, was fain to shiver and complain of the cruel cold.

Now when Francis saw that his countenance was sad and his steps heavy in their going, he cried after him and said:

"O, Brother Leo, even if the Brothers Minor should make the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear, and even to raise one from the dead, remember that in all this there is not Perfect Joy."

But Brother Leo only grunted, for he was cold and heavy of heart. After a little while Francis cried to him again:

"O, Brother Leo, if the Friars Minor knew all that was in the world, all books and languages and science and the Scriptures, not to speak of the secrets of men's souls, be it known that in all this there is not Perfect Joy."

But Brother Leo only shook his head and sighed, for he was colder than ever and very weary.

After they had gone a little further Francis called again:

"O, Brother Leo, thou little sheep of God, if the Friars Minor spoke with the tongues of Angels and knew all the secrets of the earth, of birds and beasts and fishes, of men and trees

and stones and waters, know that not in this will be found the Secret of Perfect Joy."

But Brother Leo only looked upon the ground, for his feet were frozen and his heart was sad.

Then once again, after a little space, Francis called aloud:

"O, Brother Leo, even if the Friars Minor were to preach so well that they should convert the whole world, yet know that herein is not Perfect Joy."

Now when they had covered more than two miles of the high hill road in the discourse. Brother Leo began to be astonished and to wonder what he meant. So he called over his shoulder to Francis, and said:

"I pray thee tell me. Father, for God's sake, wherein is perfect joy?"

And Francis answered and said:

"Suppose that we come to Saint Mary of the Angels, soaked with snow, frozen with cold, hungry and weary, and that when we knock eagerly at the door the porter shall come and say in an angry voice: 'Who may you be?' Suppose that when we reply 'We are two of the Brothers,' he should say 'You lie; you are two good-for-nothing beggars who are known to steal the bread of the poor. Get along with you,' and should slam the door in our face. Then, if we should bear that patiently, and going into the wind and snow, should think humbly that after all the porter had but truly described us, then, O Brother Leo, we should have found the Secret of Perfect Joy.

"And if we should return and knock again, and, weeping, beg him to open to us for the love of God, and if he should

cry out angrily: 'I will pay these rascals what they deserve,' and rush out with a great stick and seize us by the hoods and roll us in the snow and beat us well, then, if we bear all this with patience, thinking of the pains of the Blessed Jesus and all that He bore for us - then, O Brother Leo, know that there is Perfect Joy.

"For he who has learnt to conquer himself and to bear all pain and grief willingly for the love of the dear Christ has found the Secret of Perfect Joy."

And then did Brother Leo understand, so that he complained no more within himself, but walked on gladly through the snow and wind till he reached that Journey's End.

The Story of How Saint Francis Preached to the Birds

Now there came upon a time a doubt to Francis as to whether Our Lord Jesus wished him to give himself to preaching or entirely to prayer. For he himself doubted as to his gifts of preaching, seeing that he spoke always in homely words, and had not the eloquence of Saint Dominic, that eager Hound of the Lord, whose words flowed forth like torrents of sweet water.

So he sent to his holy friend, the Lady Clare, to ask that she should pray God to show him what was best for him to do; and to the gentle Brother Silvester, who had so often spoken with God, that he should ask the same.

And both these saintly people sent back the same message, which Francis received, kneeling humbly in the wood, with his arms stretched out in the form of the Cross. And the message was this:

"Let Francis go into the world to preach, seeing that God has not chosen him for himself alone, but also for the salvation of others."

Then at once Francis arose, saying: "Let us go, in the name of God." And Brothers Masseo and Agnolo went with him, not knowing whither he went.

And presently he came to a certain village, where he began to preach. But the swallows were building at that time, and they made so much noise with their twittering that the voice of Francis was drowned.

So he turned to the birds and said to them:

"My little sisters, hold you your peace until I have finished preaching, and then you shall have your turn."

And at once all the swallows obeyed him and perched about the roofs and windows to listen to his words.

And Francis preached with such fervour that all the people were minded to leave that village and go forth and follow him. But he would not allow this, saying: "Do nothing in haste, and I will tell you what you must do for the salvation of your souls."

It was on this occasion that Francis thought of establishing his Third Order of Brothers and Sisters of Saint Francis, wherein those yet living in the world might bring forth good works for the salvation of their souls.

Now when he had departed thence, he came upon a long and lonely road, and, passing along this in great fervour of soul, he lifted up his eyes and saw many trees bordering the way, and in the branches thereof a great flock of little birds, and in a field hard by another flock upon the ground.

At this the Saint was greatly surprised and said to his companions:

"Wait for me a little while in the road, and I will go preach to my sisters the birds."

And he entered the field and began to preach to them. And behold! All the birds that were in the branches of the trees came round him, and they all kept silence as long as Francis spoke. And though he moved among them and touched them with his cloak, yet not one of them moved. Nor, when he had finished preaching would they depart, until he had given them his blessing. And this was the substance of his sermon to the birds: -

"My little sisters, you ought always to praise God, for He has given you the power to fly whither you will, and soft raiment of feathers to cover you. You may thank Him also for the world of air, which He has given over to you, and for this, that you neither sow nor reap your food. For God Himself feeds you and has given you the sweet brooks for your drink, and the mountains and valleys for your refuge, and the tall trees wherein to make your nests.

"Therefore, my little sisters, beware of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to please the good God."

Then, when he ceased speaking, all the birds opened their beaks and stretched out their necks, and, fluttering their wings, they bowed their heads to the earth, showing what great pleasure the words of the Saint brought to them. And Francis rejoiced with them, praising their beauty and their tameness and their attention to his words; and in them he devoutly praised God.

Then he made the Sign of the Cross over them all, and gave them leave to depart; and immediately all the birds rose into the sky and broke out into wonderful song. And some flew to the north, some to the south, some to the east, and some to the west, all singing as they went. And by this they showed that as Francis, Standard-Bearer of Christ, had preached to them, so should he in days to come preach to the four quarters of the world.

The Story of the Vineyard of Rieti

Now there came a time when Francis had wept so many tears for the sins of the world that his eyes became sore with a grievous malady, so that he could scarce see out of them.

And when he heard thereof, that great and wise Cardinal Ugolino, who kept tender watch over all the brethren, wrote to Francis, bidding him come to Rieti, where dwelt the best doctors for his disease.

So Francis set off for Rieti, but on his way thither, he turned aside to visit Saint Damian's, in order to give consolation to the Lady Clare and her sisters. But as he went thither, the glare of the sun smote his sore eyes very grievously, and they became swollen and inflamed, so that he could not see the light at all, and was in very great pain.

Then the Lady Clare besought him to rest awhile in the cool of the garden; and she made for him there a little cell of woven reeds, where he would be safe from sun and rain, and bade him sleep and gain strength for his journey.

But when darkness fell there came great torment upon Francis, for his eyes seemed a flame of fire and his head was racked with pain. Moreover, when he tried to sleep, the mice from the garden swarmed over him, so that they gave him no peace at all.

Then, because of his weakness and his infirmity, was Francis sorely tempted to curse the creatures as they ran over his body and nibbled at his hands and feet; and he was ready to weep with impatience and the discomfort of his lot. But then he remembered that the mice were his little sisters and brothers, and that they had come, perchance, to keep him

company; he remembered also that all this discomfort was sent by the hand of One who loved him right well; and so, though he could not help but weep, he gave thanks to God, saying: "My Lord, I deserve all this and much more. And now, my dear Lord Jesus, who didst bear great agony of body that You might show mercy to us sinners, give grace to me. Your little sheep, that by no weakness, or agony, or sorrow, I may be parted from You."

And when he had said these words, there came to him a voice from Heaven, saying:

"Francis, answer Me. If you should know of a treasure more wonderful and beautiful than all the gold and precious stones in the whole world; and if you knew that this noble treasure should be earned by you by means of this malady of yours, would you not be truly glad and contented?"

And Francis made answer in his humility:

"Lord, I am not worthy of this precious treasure."

Then the Voice of God replied:

"Rejoice, Francis, for this is the treasure of eternal life which I am keeping for you; and this affliction is the means by which you shall gain it"

And at those words the heart of Francis was filled with joy so that he could have kissed the earth and sky for the great happiness they brought him; as for the little mice, he welcomed the touch of their tiny feet. And when the sun rose, filling all the world with the light of its glory, he could not keep silence, but sang aloud a song that was known henceforth as the "Canticle of Brother Sun."

This song was afterwards set to music and all the brothers learnt to sing it; for it is full of light and colour and warmth, even as the sun itself:

Be Thou blessed, O Lord, with all things created,
Especially my Lord and Brother the Sun,
For by his dawning Thou lightenest our darkness;
Beautiful is he, and radiant with mighty splendour
Of Thee, O Most High, he beareth the token.

Praised be Thou, O Lord, for our Sister Moon and the Stars
For that Thou madest them clear, precious and lovely.
Praised be Thou, O Lord, for our Brother the Wind,
For air and cloud and sunshine and every weather
Whereby Thou givest Thy creatures their food.
Praised be Thou, O Lord, for Sister Water,
Our helpmate, lowly and precious and pure.
Praised be Thou, O Lord, for our Sister the Earth,
That as a mother sustaineth and feedeth us.
And after its kind bringeth forth fruit
And grass and many-coloured flowers.

So, when the morning was come, and he had sung this song, Francis arose with great cheer, and having taken kindly farewell of the Lady Clare, set off for Rieti.

Now when Francis drew near to that city, a great multitude of citizens came forth to meet him; for by this time the fame of him had gone forth into all lands. And because of that, he would not enter by the high road, but turned aside into a little church that stood about two miles from the gates of the city, and the priest received him within. But when the people knew that, they ran together to the church to see him, and, pressing round about it, they trampled down the vineyard of the priest of that church and plucked the grapes, so that it was entirely spoilt.

Then the priest began to be very sorry, and to repent that he had received Francis into his church; for his living depended upon the grapes of his vineyard. And when Francis saw that his looks were downcast, he sent to ask him to come to him, and said:

"Dear Father, tell me, I pray, how many measures of wine did you get from this vineyard in the year that it brought forth most grapes?"

And the priest answered: "I got twelve measures that year."

Then Francis said: "I ask you, dear Father, to be patient with me and let me rest here for some days yet, since here, for the first time for long weeks, I have found repose. And let who will pluck the grapes of the vineyard for the love of God and of me, His poor little one; and if you will do this, I promise you, on the part of Christ Jesus , that every year it shall yield thee twenty measures of wine."

So the priest, trusting in his promise, gave up his vineyard to those who came to gaze upon Saint Francis. And many of these who came but to gaze, remained to listen to his words of love and penance, so that they became filled with divine wisdom.

But they ceased not to pluck the grapes of the vineyard, so that it was altogether stripped, and scarce a bunch of grapes could be found therein.

Now, when the time of vintage came, when the grapes are pressed and the juice becomes good wine, the priest of Rieti gathered the few poor clusters that had been overlooked by the multitude, and put them into the wine-press and trod them underfoot. And lo! when he had looked to find at most one poor measure, there came forth' twenty measures of the best wine, according to the promise of Francis.

The Story of How Saint Anthony Preached to the Fishes

This is the story of Friar Anthony, who, though a learned youth with a great gift of preaching, was so humble that he was scarce known among the brethren, who thought him an ignorant friar, knowing just enough Latin to get through his Mass.

Now it came to pass that on one occasion the Brothers of the Franciscan Order gave a supper to their guests of the Order of Saint Dominic, and when the meal was finished, the Father Guardian begged that one of the Dominicans would speak to the Order about the things of God. But no one would undertake to speak on these matters.

And as the Friars Minor at that table were few in number and for the most part unskilled in speech, the Father Guardian bade Brother Anthony say a few simple words as God should put them in his mouth.

Then did Saint Anthony humbly beg to be excused, but when his Superior insisted, he rose up under obedience and spoke such burning and eloquent words that all the brethren of both Orders sat amazed, seeing that they had amongst them a preacher of most notable gifts.

So presently Saint Anthony was sent to Rimini, where there were many heretics. And there, in his great longing to win back their souls, he preached to them for several days; but their hearts were hardened, so that they would not hear his words.

At length Saint Anthony, being prompted thereto by his Master, Jesus Christ, went down to the sea-shore, where the

river runs into the sea, and having placed himself on a bank between the river and the sea, he began to speak to the fishes as if the Lord had sent him to preach to them, saying:

"Listen to the Word of God, O you fishes of the sea and of the river, as the faithless heretics refuse to do so."

No sooner had he spoken these words than suddenly a great multitude of fishes, both small and great, approached the bank on which he stood, and never before had so many been seen in the sea or in the river. They all kept their heads out of the water and appeared to be looking attentively on Saint Anthony's face. And all were ranged in order and most peacefully, the smaller ones in front near the bank, after which came those a little bigger, and then, where the water was deeper, the large ones.

And Saint Anthony said to the fishes:

"My little brothers, you are bound to return thanks to your Creator who has given you such a noble element for your dwelling. For you have at your choice sweet water and salt water; you have many places of refuge from the tempest; and God your Creator, when He made you, gave you this blessing. In the Deluge, when all other creatures perished, you alone did God preserve from all harm. You it was who gave the tribute money to our Saviour Jesus Christ, when through His poverty He had not wherewith to pay. And by a wonderful and mysterious favour, you were the food of the eternal King after His Resurrection. Because of all these things you are bound to praise and bless the Lord who has given you so many and so much greater blessings than to other creatures."

At these words the fishes opened their mouths and bowed their heads, and endeavoured as much as was in their power

to show forth their reverence and their praise.

Then Saint Anthony, seeing the reverence of the fishes towards their Creator, rejoiced greatly in spirit and cried in a loud voice:

"Blessed be Eternal God! For the fishes of the sea honour Him more than men without faith, and creatures without reason listen to His Word with greater attention than the heretics."

And whilst Saint Anthony was preaching, the number of the fishes increased, and none of them left the place he had chosen.

Then the people of the city, when they heard of that miracle, made haste to go and witness it, and with them came the heretics of whom we have spoken, who, seeing such a wonderful event, were touched in their hearts, and threw themselves at the feet of Saint Anthony to hear his words.

And he preached so eloquently that all those heretics were converted and returned to the true faith of Christ. The Faithful, too, were filled with joy and greatly comforted and strengthened in the Faith. And after this Saint Anthony sent away the fishes with the blessing of God.

The Story of Saint Francis and the Sultan

In those days was held a great Crusade, whereby men hoped to win the Holy Land back from the heathen Turks. And Francis, hearing that the Sultan of Egypt himself was in command of the hostile army, set out with Brother Illuminato to speak with him.

And after many perilous adventures they came to the army of the Christians and asked leave to go over to the other side and speak with the Sultan. Then they said to Francis:

"Dost thou not know that the Sultan has offered a golden ducat for the head of any Christian sent to him? How, then, dost thou think to pass safely through the enemy's lines?"

But Francis only laughed and prayed them to let him set out.

Now when they had gone forward on that perilous road. Brother Illuminato began to be very sore afraid. But Francis pointed out two lambs that ran by the wayside, saying joyfully: "Put thy trust in the Lord, brother, for in us is fulfilled those words of His: 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.'"

Presently, however, there came out men against them who began to handle them roughly, not understanding their speech. But Francis cried out all the time:

"Sultan! Sultan!"

So they took him to the Sultan's tent.

Now the Sultan, who had been warned of his approach, had ordered a carpet, covered with crosses, to be spread on the floor of the tent. For he said:

"If he treads on the crosses I will accuse him of insulting his God; if he refuses to walk on it I will accuse him of insulting me."

But Francis, when he entered, walked upon the carpet without hesitation.

"See, you have trodden on the Cross that you profess to honour," said the Sultan.

But Francis answered and said:

"You must know Our Lord died between two thieves, who also hung upon crosses. We Christians have the true Cross; but the crosses of the thieves we leave to you, and these I am not ashamed to tread upon."

Then the Sultan was so struck by his courage and wit that he began to listen to his teaching; and he prayed him to come often, and gave him and his companions free leave to preach wheresoever they pleased. And he gave them a password whereby they would be protected from injury.

At length, however, Francis saw that he could reap no more fruit in these parts, and that God willed him to return to his

native land. So he went for the last time to the Sultan to take leave of him. Then said the Sultan to him:

"Brother Francis, I would willingly turn to the faith of Christ , but I fear to do so now. For, if it became known, they would kill both me and thee and thy companions. I would not, therefore, at this time bring death upon thee and upon myself, but teach me how I may be saved; I am prepared to do all that thou mayst lay upon me."

Then Francis said:

"My lord, I must now depart from thee; but after I shall have returned to mine own country, and shall have gone to heaven, by the Grace of God, after my death, I will send thee two of my Brothers from whom thou shalt receive the baptism of Christ , and so shalt thou be saved, as has been revealed to me by the Lord Jesus. And do thou meantime keep thyself free from all that shall hinder the Grace of God."

And this he promised to do.

So Francis departed with his companions, and after several years, he passed from this earth into the hands of God.

Now after that time the Sultan became extremely ill, and expecting the promise of Francis to be fulfilled, he had guards placed at certain passes of the hills, and commanded that if two Brothers should appear in the habit of the Friars Minor, they should forthwith be brought to him.

At the same time the spirit of Francis appeared to two Brothers, commanding them to go without delay to the Sultan and to give him Holy Baptism for the salvation of his soul.

In haste they departed and went across the sea and were at once conducted into the Sultan's presence.

And when he saw them he was filled with joy, saying:

"Now I know of a truth that God has sent His servants for my salvation, according to the promise of Francis."

Therefore he received instruction in the Faith and Baptism from those two Brothers; and, dying soon after, of the illness from which he suffered, his soul was saved by the promise and prayer of holy Francis.

The Story of How the Birds Welcomed Saint Francis

Now some twenty years after the conversion of Francis, it came to pass that he left the Valley of Spoleto, where he had dwelt of late, and journeyed with Brother Leo into Romagna. And on the way thither they passed by the foot of a great castle, where, at that time, a wedding festival was being held.

Amongst the nobles there present was one Orlando, a great and wealthy gentleman of Tuscany, who had heard of the fame of Francis, and was eager to see him and hear him preach.

Now Francis, when he saw that gay crowd, was well pleased, for he loved to see people merry and happy; and all the time he longed to turn their souls to God. So he entered into the courtyard and mingled for a time among the courtiers and gentlemen; but presently, moved by the spirit of God, and mindful of the custom of the travelling minstrels of that day, he mounted upon a parapet and began to sing these words, which forthwith became the text of his sermon:

"A joy to me is every pain,
For I await a greater gain."

And as he preached to them the people, one and all, listened as though to an angel of God.

Amongst these listeners was Orlando, who was so moved by his words that he came to Francis, and, taking him apart, said:

"O, Father, I would converse with thee about the salvation of my soul."

To which Francis answered:

"Most willingly, my son; but first go and do honour to thy friends who have invited thee to the feast, and dine with them; and after the banquet we will talk as much as thou wilt"

And this was done; and, because of the gratitude of Orlando for all that Francis did for the salvation of his soul, he gave to the saint a solitary place called Mount Alvemia, in Tuscany, where he and his companions might retire in perfect solitude, when they wished to be alone with God. The spot was very high and bare and lonely; and there they made cells for the brethren with branches of fir-trees from the slopes below.

Now when Lent was come, Francis and three of the Brothers set out on the long journey to Mount Alvernia; and since Francis was at that time very feeble of body, the brothers went to a poor peasant and begged him for the love of God to lend his ass for Brother Francis, who could not go on foot. So the man lent his ass and helped him to mount, and, as they went upon their journey, the peasant walked behind him.

Now when they had gone some way, the peasant said to Francis: "Tell me, art thou Brother Francis of Assisi?"

And Francis answered "Yes."

"Try then," said the peasant, "to be as good as all think thee to be, because many have great faith in thee; and, therefore, I would that thou be nothing less than people hope of thee."

Now there be some who would have been angry at those words, saying: "How coarse and ignorant is he who thus admonishes me!"

But Francis, when he heard him, quickly dismounted and threw himself on the ground and knelt before the man and kissed his feet, thanking him humbly for his warning.

Then the peasant and his companions replaced him on the ass, and they went on their way.

Now the sun was very hot, the dust of the wayside very plentiful, and the road very steep; and soon there came upon Francis such a terrible thirst that he cried out:

"Woe is me, how I pant for thirst! If I do not get some water I shall surely die."

Thus saying, he dismounted and knelt by the wayside in prayer, with his hands lifted up to Heaven. Then, turning to the peasant, he said: "Run quickly to yonder stone and thou shalt find there living water which Christ in His mercy hath made to flow forth for our necessity."

And it was as he had said.

Now when they approached the slopes of Mount Alvernia there came out of the trees hard by a multitude of little birds, which, with singing and beating of their wings, showed the greatest joy and gladness, and surrounded Francis in such a manner that some perched on his head, some on his shoulder, some on his arms and legs, and some round about his feet.

And Francis, seeing this, was very joyful in spirit, and said to his companions:

"I believe, most beloved Brothers, that it pleases Our Lord Jesus Christ that we should inhabit this solitary mountain, because so much joy is shown at our arrival by our little sisters and brothers the birds."

And so they came to the place that their brothers had chosen for them beforehand.

The Story of How Saint Francis Received the Holy Marks

Now after Francis and his companions had dwelt for a while upon Mount Alvernia, the Saint began to wish for a still more solitary and lonely lodging. And he called Brother Leo and said to him: "Go and stand in the doorway of the Oratory where the Brothers are lodged, and when I call thee, return to me."

So Brother Leo stood in the door; and Francis having found for himself a cave, called aloud, and Brother Leo ran and came to him at once. Then said Francis:

"My son, let us seek another more retired spot, where thou canst not hear me when I call"

Now at some distance off they found a solitary spot exactly according to his wish, but it was impossible to get to it because there lay an immense rock with a fearful yawning chasm in front of it. But with great difficulty they laid a piece of wood across it so as to form a bridge, and so got over.

So they made a little cell there in the rock, where no cry of his could be heard. But once a day Brother Leo brought a little bread and water to the end of the bridge saying:

"O Lord, open thou my mouth."

And if the Saint replied "And my tongue shall show forth Thy praise," he passed over to the cell; but if he answered not, he was to depart in haste, knowing that the Saint was holding converse with God.

And Francis remained in this solitary spot for forty days, suffering many attacks of the devil, but also much consolation from his Captain, Jesus Christ. And during all the time a falcon which had built its nest close to the cell woke him every night a little before matins with its call, and with the beating of its wings against the cell, and would not depart until he arose to say his matins. But if Francis was more weary than usual, or weak or infirm, the falcon, like a discreet and compassionate person, woke him later than usual. And for this cause Francis took great delight in this bird, which oftentimes by day would sit familiarly with him.

Now when it grew near the Feast of the Most Holy Cross, Brother Leo went one night to the usual place to say matins with Francis; but when he called to him, he could get no reply . Wherefore, being in fear of what might have happened, he crossed over the bridge, and, finding the cave empty, went softly searching in the wood by the light of the moon. And, hearing the voice of Francis, he presently found him kneeling with his face and hands raised to Heaven; and he heard him say in fervour of spirit:

"Who art Thou, O my most sweet God, and what am I, Thy worthless servant?"

And these words he repeated continually, saying nothing beside.

And when Brother Leo, marvelling, raised his eyes, he saw as it were a torch of fire descend upon the head of Francis, and he heard a voice which spoke from the midst of the flame, but he could not understand the words.

And in his fear to offend or trouble the Saint, Brother Leo withdrew softly into the background, but Saint Francis

perceived him by the rustling of the leaves beneath his feet, and called him, saying:

"Wherefore hast thou come, thou Little Sheep of God? Tell me, hast thou seen or heard aught?"

Then Brother Leo confessed that he had both heard and seen a marvellous thing, and having implored pardon for his disobedience, he prayed him earnestly to explain what had taken place.

And then did the holy Francis explain that it was God himself who had thus spoken with His poor little servant.

Now when the Feast of the Most Holy Cross was fully come, Francis, praying before his cell with his face towards the East, made two petitions, saying:

"O my dear Lord Jesus, I pray You to grant me two graces before I die. The first is, that in my lifetime I may feel in my soul and in my body, as far as it is possible, all the pain and grief which You, O sweet Lord, didst feel in Your most bitter Passion. And the second is, that I may feel in my heart, as far as it is possible, that great love by which Tou were moved to suffer so for sinners."

And he remained thus for a long time in prayer, thinking much of the Passion of his dear Lord.

And that same morning he saw coming from heaven a seraph with six fiery wings; and as He approached Francis with great speed he saw that He had the form of One Crucified. And two of His wings were above His head, two were stretched in flight, and two covered His body.

Now as this wondrous sight appeared, the whole mountain of Alvernia seemed to burn with flame as though the sun had

risen on the earth; so that the shepherds upon the hillsides thought that the mountain was afire; and certain mule-drivers who had been sleeping in far-off little inns, seeing that light, rose with haste and saddled and loaded their beasts, believing that it was break of day; and as they journeyed along they saw the light cease and the natural sun arise.

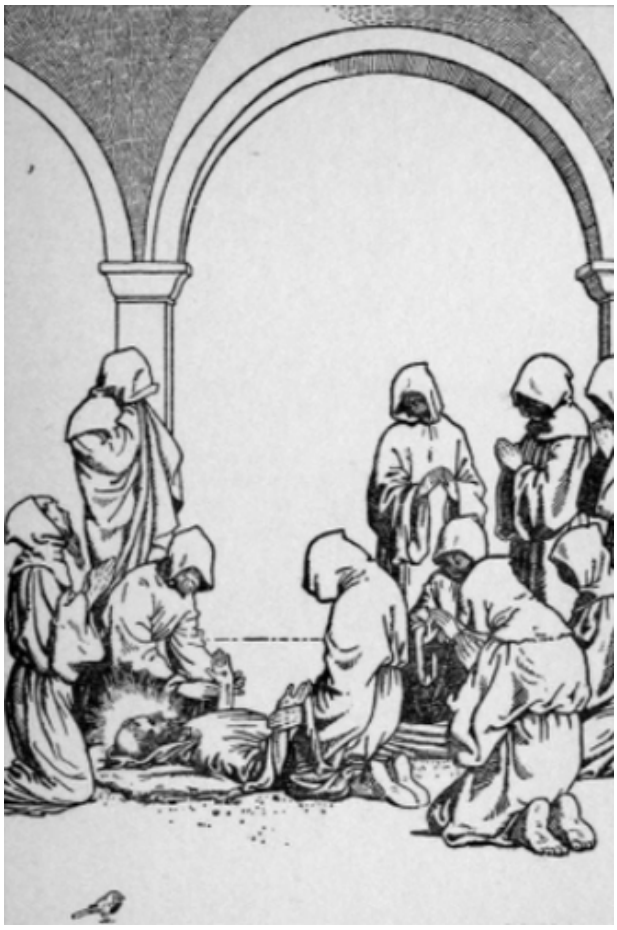
Then, after a great space of time and secret converse that left the heart of Francis full of the flame of divine love, that wondrous vision disappeared, leaving in his flesh a marvellous image of the Suffering of Christ.

For in his hands and his feet there immediately began to appear the marks of the nails as he had seen them in the flesh of Christ Crucified, so that his hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle with nails. And in his right side there was the appearance of a wound made by a lance, not healed but newly made.

And these wounds, or Passion marks, are called "Stigmata," and Francis carried them to the day of his holy death.

The Story of the Passing of Saint Francis

Now it presently came to pass that the bodily sickness of blessed Francis increased very greatly, so that he learnt by the mouth of one of his Brothers that he had not long to live.



And at that news the heart of Francis was filled with gladness, and he bade the Brethren come to his bedside and sing to him once more his "Canticle of Brother Sun."

And when they had so done, he added in his fervour of joy, yet one more verse. This is the order of it:

Praise be to Thee, O Lord, for Sister Death
From whom no living man can flee;
Blessed are they whose will is one with Thine -
To them shall Sister Death be truest friend.

Then there came to him Brother Elias, stern of face and heart, and rebuked him for his singing, saying that the men of the city were asking "How is it that he thus openly rejoices, he who is about to die?"

But Francis answered: "Leave me, Brother, to rejoice in the Lord and in the sickness that He sends me; for by His grace I

am so united and wedded to my Lord that I can well be merry in the Most High."

It was late in the summer that they carried Francis down for the last time to his beloved Little Portion (Porziuncula), where he had made his earliest home after his conversion. Over the road he had so often tramped they carried him, blind and helpless, upon his bed; and from the bend of the hill he turned his sightless eyes for the last time upon Assisi, the city of his love.

Then, when the hour of his departing drew very nigh, the Brothers once more gathered round him and sang to him the Canticle of Brother Sun; and he blessed them all, and broke bread and gave a portion to each as a remembrance of the love which existed between them. And they wept that he should leave them; but Francis, with a loud voice, cried out:

"Welcome, Sister Death! Thou art to me the gate of life!"

Then he bade them lay him on the ground on sackcloth and ashes, that he might keep his vow of poverty to the very end; and just after the sun had set, he died.

Outside the cell a great company of larks sang Vespers overhead, as a bright ray of light, borne by a little cloud, passed upward to the sky.

About This Article

The text and illustrations for this ebook were taken from the book *A Little Book of Saint Francis and His Brethren*, written by Ethel Mary Wilmot-Buxton, illustrated by Morris Meredith Williams, published by Pelican Press, Carmelite Street, London, England in 1920. A scan of the original work, which is missing one illustration, is available at archive.org.

For more free ebooks, other material by or about Saint Francis, or thousands of other saints, beati, venerables, servants of God, devotions, or the history of the Church, come see us at -

CatholicSaints.Info

** or **

CatholicSaints.Mobi